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কালচার, অ্যানথ্রোপলজি অ্যান্ড লিঙ্গুইস্টিক্স

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(সাহিত্য-সংস্কৃতি-নৃত্য)

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Tradition and transformation of culture in a matrilineal society: A Study on the Rabha tribe of West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

When the descent is traced through mother's line it is called matrilineal. There are a few matrilineal communities in the world. For example, Trobriand Islanders, Ashanti of Ghana, Bemba of Zambia (a sect of Bantu), Minangkabau of Sumatra and so on. In India there are matrilineal tribes like Khasi, Garo, Jaintia and the Rabha, residing mainly in the north eastern states. Among them Rabha and Garo tribes are found in West Bengal. The objective of the study was to understand the tradition and change connected to the matrilineal aspects of the Rabha society. The Rabha are mainly concentrated in Alipurduar district of West Bengal. The present study was done in a forest village of Alipurduar district. The study was based on primary data collected through field work. It was mainly dependent on qualitative data gathered through anthropological research methodologies like observation, genealogy, case study and interview. It has been observed that the traditional matrilineal societies are undergoing changes mainly due to influence of the neighbouring patrilineal communities. Changes could be observed in family, kinship and clan structure. The women in the Rabha family have a special position. They participate in economic activities and local political system. But modern outlook towards life, inter-caste marriage, change in religious beliefs etc. are influencing transformation of Rabha tribe from matrilineal to patrilineal.





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1.0 Introduction

In women centered societies there was always a sharp categorical difference in conceptualizing the family structure either to be matrilineal or matriarchal and/ or only matrilineal. When the descent is traced through maternal side it is called matrilineal. Matriarchal means women have power over the men. They have the authority in the society which is a rare incidence. Matrilineal residence pattern is commonly found in matrilineal societies. In that case the married couple lives with the parents of the bride or with the maternal kin. Matrilineal is the most discussed discourse in anthropology. L. H. Morgan (1877) explained matrilineal as an important part of the sequence of social evolution. According to Radcliffe Brown (1924) a society could be called matriarchal when descent, inheritance and succession are in the female line and residence followed after marriage is matrilineal and the children are born at mother's clan. Bronislaw Malinowski (1927) argued that matrilineal descent influenced psycho-dynamic processes of parenting. He described Trobriand fathering in comparison with western fathering. It is sometimes thought that matrilineal systems necessarily involve a more equal relationship between spouse, but it is not always true. Fortes (1950) noted that claims and bonds created by marriage and fatherhood presumably had to be adjusted to those imposed by matrilineal kinship. Audrey Richards gave this problem a name and called it the "Matrilineal Puzzle" (1950). Schneider (1961) claimed that matrilineal societies did "not require the statuses of father and husband," because their roles were taken over by the MoBro and Br.

There are a very few existing matrilineal tribes in the world e.g. the Ashanti of Ghana, the Bemba of Zambia (a sect of Bantu), the Minangkabau of Sumatra, the Mosuo of China and so on. In India the most prominent matrilineal tribe is the Khasi. Besides the Garo, the Rabha and the Jaintia are also traditionally matrilineal communities mainly residing in north eastern states of India. The Nayar of South India was also a matrilineal tribe.

The Rabha is one of the Scheduled Tribes of India mainly residing in the North Eastern Hill region. They are considered as the member of great Bodo group having great affinity with the Garos. The Rabha are divided into a number of sub-tribes and a number of exogamous clans (cited in





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Vidyarthi and Rai, 1976). According to some scholars the Rabha belong to the *Kocha* race. According to Robert Montgomery Martin (1838), the Rabha are akin to the *Panikoch*. The language spoken by the Rabha are similar with the *Kochas*. The Koch and the Rabha both belong to the Bodo language sub-group under the Assam-Burmese group. According to Das (1955) the sub tribes found among the Rabha are *Pati*, *Rangdania*, *Maitari*, *Koch*, *Dahari*, *Bitalia* and *Shonga*. Inter group marriage was permitted between *Rangdania*, *Pati* and *Maitoris*. The Rabha community is further divided into a number of exogamous clans known as *Husuk*. Das and Raha (1967) have found around 30 clans among the Rabha. Some of these are *Banda*, *Bantao*, *Kantran Kara*, *Kama*, *Mojji*, *Nogora*, *Uni* etc. For instance, *Banda* clan is sub divided into sub-clans *Bandhadhai*, *Bandasusuk* and *Bandasang*. *Moji* clan is divided into a number of sub clans like *Mojidong*, *Mojisamper*, *Mojinal*, *Mojipran*, *Mojibhoj* and *Mojibhobra*. Some of these are totemistic in nature.

Traditionally the Rabha were matrilineal, but at present they are undergoing changes and adopting patriliney to a large extent. The reasons are many. The present study aims at understanding the continuity and change of the matrilineal tradition among the Rabha of West Bengal.

Objectives:

- To know the traditional practices related to the matrilineal aspects of the Rabhas.
- To find out the factors influencing change from matriliney to patriliney in Rabha society.

2.0 Materials and methods:

2.1 Selection of the study area:

The present study was done in a forest village chiefly inhabited by the Rabha tribe. The village namely Andu Bana Basty is situated under Mathura Tea Garden Gram Panchayat and Alipurduar- I block of Alipurduar district in West Bengal. There are three Beat offices under Chilapata range namely Mendabari, Bania and Chilapata. Andu Bana Basty and Bania Basty are under Bania Beat, Kurmai Basty is under Chilapata Beat and Mendabari (Uttar and Dakshin) are situated under





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Mendabari beat. The village boundary is formed by the agricultural field at the western side, Jaigaon road at the north, Chilapata forest at south and eastern sides. The neighbouring villages are Kodol Basti (North), Chakwakheta (South), Bania Basti (East), Kurmai Basti (West). Andu Bana Basti is a traditional Rabha village. As recorded by the Gram Panchayat in January 2018 there were 112 Rabha families in Andu Bana Basti inhabited by 487 individuals including 239 males and 248 females. The present study covered 61 families selected purposively i.e. 55% of the total families have been covered.

2.2 Data collection and analysis:

The study included both primary and secondary data. Secondary data on the Rabha tribe were collected through online web-based search engines using key words such as the Rabha of Assam and West Bengal. A few articles and books were also consulted. Relevant literatures on kinship and descent were downloaded from JSTOR.

This paper is mainly based on qualitative data collected from the field. The family level data was collected through census schedule. The anthropological methods used to collect data are genealogical table, interview, group discussion and case studies. Special focus was given on matrilineal families. Genealogical tables were analysed in respect of kinship relations prevalent in matrilineal families among the studied population. Aged people were interviewed regarding clan and case histories were taken from women regarding life cycle rituals. All data were analysed systematically. Quantitative data was taken regarding population and types of families in the studied area.

2.3 Duration of Field work: The field work was done during November, 2018 to June, 2019.

2.4 Findings:





3.0 Distribution of the Rabha:

The Rabha people are residing in different parts of Assam and its adjacent states like Meghalaya, West Bengal, Bihar, Sikkim etc. (Rabha, 1998). The Rabha of Western Duars (lies along the foot hills of Himalaya between Teesta and Sankosh rivers) may be sub divided into two groups on the basis of ecological set up; The Forest Rabha who lives in the reserve forests and the Village Rabha living in villages away from the forest. Both of them belong to the Kocha Rabha section. The Forest Rabha live in Basti constructed by the forest department (Raha, 1974).

The population of the Rabhas in West Bengal was recorded to be 27,820 as per 2011 Census which forms only 0.53% of the total tribal population of the state. Majority of them lived in the Jalpaiguri district (52.07%) which included both Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar district. Two other districts have considerable Rabha population. These are Coochbihar (13.66%) and Uttar Dinajpur (18.69%). The following table shows the population of the Rabha tribe in West Bengal as per Census of 2011.

Table no. 1: District wise population of the Rabha (2011 Census)

District wise distribution	Male	Female	Persons	
	No.	No.	No.	%
WEST BENGAL	14,255	13,565	27,820	100.00
Darjiling	29	15	44	0.16
Jalpaiguri	7,410	7,077	14,487	52.07
Koch Bihar	1,936	1,865	3,801	13.66
Uttar Dinajpur	2,719	2,480	5,199	18.69
Dakshin Dinajpur	659	692	1,351	4.86
Maldah	664	630	1,294	4.65
Murshidabad	329	296	625	2.25
Birbhum	44	59	103	0.37
Barddhaman	22	21	43	0.15
Nadia	37	30	67	0.24
North Twenty Four Parganas	219	214	433	1.56



Hugli	8	14	22	0.08
Bankura	10	8	18	0.06
Puruliya	2	0	2	0.01
Haora	7	11	18	0.06
Kolkata	16	11	27	0.10
South Twenty four Parganas	14	13	27	0.10
Paschim Medinipur	124	124	248	0.89
Purba Medinipur	6	5	11	0.04

3.1 The studied area:

Alipurduar is a newly formed district of West Bengal bordered by Jalpaiguri in the west, Assam in the east and Coochbihar in the south. In the north the district shares an international border line with Bhutan. The topography of the land is cut across by rivers, streams and hills, and covered with tea gardens and forests. The two main reserve forests in Alipurduar district are Jaldapara and Buxa Tiger Reserve forest. The Chilapata range is the dense semi-evergreen forest of Alipurduar. Chilapata was the first forest area in West Bengal where people belonging to the indigenous Rabha and Mech communities, along with Jharkhandi Adibasi settlers had officially proclaimed their governance rights over forests under FRA 2006. The studied village - Andu Bana Basti is situated near the Chilapata forest beat office. It is under Dakkhin Borojhar Mouja and Mathura Bagan Gram Panchayat of Alipurduar-I block. There were 105,017 Scheduled Castes and 36,607 Scheduled Tribes in Alipurduar-I block. The village boundary is formed by Agricultural field at the western side, Jaigaon road at the north, Chilapata forest at south and eastern sides. It is a true forest village. The neighbouring villages are Kodal Basti (North), Chaka Kheti (South), Bania Basti (East), Kurmai Basti (West).

The houses in Andu Bana Basti are settled lineally at the beginning, but at the end the settlement pattern is clustered. The traditional houses are composed of wooden plank with asbestos or tin roof. Almost all the houses are arranged in a high platform above the ground with the help of wooden log. This kind of arrangement is to protect the house from attack of wild elephants. At

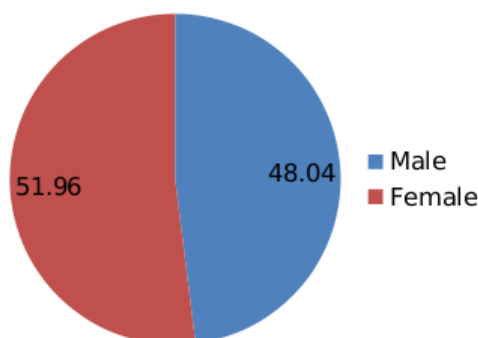


present they are constructing pucca houses. So, in the village both traditional wooden house as well as concrete houses could be seen. The Rabha term for the house is *Nogoh*.

3.2 The studied population:

The population of the studied Rabha families (N=62) were recorded to be 297 including 147 males and 159 females. The sex ratio was 1081.63 female per 1000 male.

Chart 1: Sex wise distribution of the population



Significantly female population is higher than male population in Andu Bana Basti. The birth of the girl child is accepted gracefully in the Rabha society. According to them girls carry forward the lineage.

The Rabha of Andu Bana Basti are mainly dependent on agriculture. According to the villagers the Basti was established around 100 years ago. They got agricultural and homestead land from the forest department during settlement. They were settled in the forest village and became engaged as labours under forest department. Still a majority of the population depend on the forest as secondary source of income.

4.0 Clan organisation and matrilineal descent:



The Rabha of the studied area follow matrilineal descent. According to the matrilineal custom, the new born is identified through their maternal *Husuk* i.e. clan. These are strictly exogamous. People belonging to same *Husuk* are treated as close kins having ancestral blood relation. The clans are divided into a number sub clan. Members of the clan having specific totem follow taboo as prescribed by the society like prohibition of eating the totemistic animal, fish, bird or parts of the plant. In the studied areas following clans have been found.

Table – 2: List of clan and sub clan found among the Rabhas of Andu Bana Basty

Serial No.	Clan and sub clan	Totem
1.	<i>Banda</i>	<i>Boai</i> fish (<i>Wallago attu</i>) and milk
2.	<i>Banda Susuk</i>	<i>Cook</i> – insect found in the rice grain
3.	<i>Bandasang</i>	<i>Nazma</i> – a local fish
4.	<i>Bantao</i>	Brinjal
5.	<i>Dwbw</i>	Pigeon
6.	<i>Kamchan/Uswng</i>	Tortoise
7.	<i>Kantran</i>	<i>Dauk</i> , a kind of bird
8.	<i>Katrang</i>	Turnip leaf
9.	<i>Manji</i>	Fish- <i>Magur</i> (a kind of cat fish) and <i>Poa</i> (local fish)
10	<i>Mojji/Majena</i>	Boal fish (<i>Wallago attu</i>)



11	<i>Mojipran</i>	<i>Amloki</i> , a fruit (<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i>)
.		
12	<i>Muchai</i>	Peacock egg
.		
13	<i>Nora</i>	They don't use fuel wood (Khor)
.		
14	<i>Paisbok/Goichak</i>	Betel leaf and betel nut
.		
15	<i>Pantao/ Chingku</i>	Ginger
.		
16	<i>Pamrei</i>	Tortoise
.		
17	<i>Rundu/ Kwoda</i>	Duck
.		

There are many stories connect to the origin of specific clan or *Husuk* of the Rabha which relates to their matrilineal aspect. The origin of the *Banda-Susuk* clan includes a story. Long back a man thrown her daughter on the fire for some unknown reason. From then onward her lineage is called *Susuk* as it means 'to throw'.



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The story behind formation of *Banda and Moiji* clan is somehow similar. Both the clans refrain from eating Boal fish (*Wallago attu*). The story says that a mother and son were living together near forest. The mother was eaten by a big Boal fish. Son found her inside the jungle in the stomach of the Boal fish. He cut the belly with a dagger and helped his mother to come out of the stomach of the Boal fish. Then he stitched off the belly of the fish and let it go. When the fish was running away the mother said that she will never eat Boal fish. Since then her lineage forbid eating Boal fish.

Moijipran, a sub clan of *Moijibor* has another story. A little girl lost in the jungle was living on a fruit called *prantei* which means *Amlaki* (*Phyllanthus emblica*). The people belonging to *Moijibor* clan rescued her and decided her new clan to be *Moijipran*. Naturally *Moijipran* has lower status than the *Moijibor*. *Moiji* or *Moijibar* are not allowed to marry with any sub clan of *Moiji*. Similarly sub clans of *Banda* like *Bandhai*, *Banda susuk* or *Bandasak* are not allowed to intermarry. Apart from the enlisted clans above, some other clans were found, but the members belonging to those clans could not identify their totems. These are *Barakila*, *Chinchak*, *Choudei*, *Premdan* and *Rusam*.

The above stories link the clan members to the maternal descent. These stories are transmitted orally from one generation to the other. The children generally belong to the mother's clan. This is the most common form found in the studied areas. But a few families are adopting father's clan. This happens in case of patrilocal residence. So a shift from matriliney to patriliney becomes inevitable in such case.

5.0 Descent and inheritance pattern:

The Rabhas prefer ultimogeniture. The major share of the property goes to the younger daughters and she stays with the parents after marriage. In case of single daughter, the lion's share of the property goes to her. Sometimes distribution of property depends on the adjustment between the brothers and sisters. Brothers can reside in their wife's house. Elder daughter may also come to stay





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with her parents. In that case residential land is shared by the daughters. All movable property of the mother goes to the daughter. The immovable property goes to all sons and daughters. But there is condition for transfer of property. If the son prefers matrilineal residence after marriage he will not get share of the parental property. But if he follows patrilineal residence he gets share of the parental property. Same rule is applicable to the daughters. The daughters living with their parents get lion's share and sometime the whole property. But the daughters married to a patrilineal family are not entitled to the parent's property. Now-a-days many girls are choosing patrilineal residence after marriage.

The settlement of Andu Bana Basti is nearly hundred years old. The villagers recently got *patta* for their land. It has been found that although land rights are bestowed on the women of the family in Rabha society, but the government officials mentioned the name of the male members in the papers of *patta*. In this way the land right goes in the hand of the male members. This happens due to lack of awareness among the government officials regarding customary law of the Rabha. They hardly understand the importance of property right prevalent in a matrilineal society. The villagers also did not try to rectify the papers. They could not understand how change is infiltrating. Change from matriline to patriline could be observed through genealogical charts.

6.0 Understanding tradition and change through genealogies (Annexure):

6.1 Genealogy 1:

Anita Rabha (G III.4) aged 24 years is the successor of her mother Rong Rabha (G II.10) who died long back at the age of 30 years. It is one among the matrilineal families in Andu Bana Basti. Rosai Rabha (G II.9), father of Anita Rabha was a *gharjawai* of Samar (G I.3) and Adek Rabha (G I.4). Anita Rabha inherited the clan name of her mother i.e. Banda while her mother inherited it from her mother Adek Rabha. The homestead land was inherited matrilineally through three generations from Adek Rabha to Rong Rabha to Anita Rabha. Anita Rabha's three maternal uncles were also living in Andu





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Bana Basti in the land given by their mother Adek. Anita's maternal uncles were living in their wife's house as they did not inherit their mother's land, but their wives did.

Anita Rabha has a son and a daughter. She said that she would prefer to bring *gharjawai* for her daughter and she does not bother about her son. He may choose either matrilocal residence or patrilocal residence as per his wish.

Anita's only brother Raju (G III.2) married twice. In first marriage he followed patrilocal residence. She belonged to *Manji* clan. His second wife Luping Rabha (G III.1) belonged to *Banda* clan. As Raju and Luping belonged to the same clan they had to give penance to remain in the community as clan endogamy is strictly prohibited in Rabha community. Their marriage was held at Luping Rabha's maternal uncle's house. Presently he is living with her second wife at Surat, while her first wife is staying at her in-law's house.

Rosai Rabha's parents Gaya Rabha (G I.1) and Nagasari Rabha (G I.2) lived in Khukun Basti at Gairkata, Jalpaiguri district. His family was also matrilocal. His only sister Nuni Rabha lived with her parents and her husband is staying there as *gharjawai*. His brothers did not inherit any property of his parents. Rather they were also staying at their wife's house.

6.2 Genealogy 2:

The genealogical table no. 2 shows a different trend that signifies deviation from pure matriliney. The ego Iti Rabha (G III.4) aged 28 years was married to Chotten Rabha (G III.3) (36 years) who belonged to the same village. Iti inherited her mother's clan *Bantao*. Chotten Rabha inherited his mother's clan *Prandan*. But they said their children belong to their father's clan that is *Prandan*. Iti Rabha was residing at her mother's land at Andu Basti. Iti's mother Mari Rabha (G II.4) also inherited her mother's property. Chotten Rabha's brother is living with her parents as they do not have sister. It needs to be mentioned that Iti is the only living child of her parents as her brother died long back.



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The young generation of the Raba society in Andu Basti thinks positively about the changing trend from matrilineal residence to patrilineal residence. The girls think that patrilineal residence is better as most of the people around them are practicing the same. The educated Rabha women do not want to stay at mother's house. According to the young generation an educated woman deserves a man having higher status than her. The higher status of the man means his educational and economic achievements. That means a man of lower economic and educational status are now agrees to be *gharjawai*. The young boys also prefer patrilineal residence now-a-days. They believe that staying as *gharjawai* indicates diminution of their status. Both the young girls and boys agreed that matrilineal residence can be accepted only in case of single girl child in the family. The justification is to look after the parents.

6.3 Kinship system associated with the matrilineal aspect:

The kinship system of the Rabhas helps to understand the consanguineal and affinal bonding prevalent in their society and how it is influenced by the matrilineal aspect. The girls are called *Mao* in the Rabha language and they get respect as mothers. The daughter is designated as *Samchi*. The Rabha kinship system is descriptive in nature. They have specific term for every relation. There is prominent sex differentiation. Generation wise difference in terms could also be found. Most of the terms differentiate between the relatives of mother's side and father's side. The father's father and mother's father are designated by different term (*Aoabuda/Asubuda*), while father's mother and mother's mother are also designated by different terms (*Awai*). In Rabha family maternal uncle and paternal aunt have special position. Maternal uncle and paternal aunt's husband are designated by the same term (*Mama*), while paternal aunt and maternal uncle's wife is designated by the same term (*Amai*). The Rabhas are closely associated with their maternal kins and they have to perform some duties and responsibilities during life cycle rituals. During marriage bride's mother gives a special ring to the bride which is called *Chitam*. The new born baby is welcomed at home either by the maternal uncle or paternal aunt. Then other family members can visit the baby. Husband and wife





address each other as *Jug*. They have respect for each other. Cross cousin marriage is common. The kinship terms found in the studied area are as follows.

Table – 3: Kinship terms found among the in Rabha in the studied area

Serial no.	Local term	English term
1	<i>Achu</i>	Mother's father and Mother's father's brother
2	<i>Ajong</i>	Younger brother
3	<i>Akai</i>	Father's elder brother's wife
4	<i>Amai</i>	Mother
5	<i>Awibudi</i>	Mother's mother and mother's mother's sister
6	<i>Anwngsha</i>	Wife's brother
7	<i>Anwng</i>	Husband of older sister
8	<i>Anan</i>	Brother's wife, also called <i>Jabok</i>
9	<i>Anwngsha</i>	Husband's sister
10	<i>Anwngshani jug</i>	Wife's brother's wife
11	<i>Anao</i>	Younger sister
12	<i>Aoabuda/Asubuda</i>	Father's father and father's father's brother
13	<i>Aowa</i>	Father
14	<i>Atai</i>	Father's elder brother
15	<i>Awai</i>	Mother's mother/ father's mother
16	<i>Awaisha</i>	Granddaughter
17	<i>Awaishani jug</i>	Granddaughter's husband
18	<i>Aya</i>	Elder sister
19	<i>Ayabudi</i>	Father's mother and father's mother's sister
20	<i>Botai</i>	Father's younger brother and Mother's sister's husband
21	<i>Da</i>	Elder brother and Husband's elder brother
22	<i>Etei</i>	Father's older brother's wife and mother's elder sister
23	<i>Eiti</i>	Father's younger brother's wife and mother's younger

		sister
24	<i>Habbo</i>	Sister's husband
25	<i>Hui</i>	Mother's mother and father's mother
26	<i>Janai</i>	Sister-in-law
27	<i>Jaboksha</i>	Husband's younger brother
28	<i>Jabokshani jug</i>	Husband's brother's wife
29	<i>Jug</i>	Husband/wife designates each other
30	<i>Kelang</i>	Son-in-law
31	<i>Khou</i>	Father- in- law
32	<i>Klagan</i>	Husband of younger sister
33	<i>Mama</i>	Mother's brother and paternal aunt's husband
34	<i>Mamai</i>	Father's sister's husband
35	<i>Mani/Amai</i>	Father's sister and Mother's brother's wife
36	<i>Namsha</i>	Wife
37	<i>Noushi</i>	Wife's sister
38	<i>Nrei/Amai</i>	Mother-in-law
39	<i>Saba/Sabutwi</i>	Older son
40	<i>Samichik</i>	Daughter
41	<i>Sapturi</i>	Younger son
42	<i>Uchwcha</i>	Grandson or granddaughter's son
43	<i>Uchniuisa</i>	Grandson or granddaughter's daughter also called <i>Uchwcha Michik</i>
44	<i>Uchu</i>	Mother's father/father's father
45	<i>Uchusha</i>	Grandson
46	<i>Uchushani jug</i>	Grandson's wife
47	<i>Uwaisha</i>	Grand daughter

6.4 Influence of matriliney on life cycle rituals:

The Rabhas in the studied area are changing towards patriliney. But still matrilineal aspects are imbedded in their life cycle rituals.



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6.4.1 Birth - Birth is an occasion of joy among the Rabha. Birth of a girl child is taken very gracefully. Difference in ritual practices observed at birth of boy child and girl child signifies the presence of traditional belief among them. Case study suggested that in case of boy child the stump is wrapped in a cloth and tied on the child's hand. In case of abdominal pain, the stump is dipped in the water and the water is given to the child. It minimizes the pain. This water is called *Otfai*. The stump and the naval cord of the boy child are thrown in the jungle. The Rabha people believe that the boy has to go to the bride's house after marriage and for this reason the naval cord may be thrown out. In case of the girl child the process of disposal of the naval cord is different. It is buried beneath the pitcher full of water at home. They believed that it will keep baby's head cool. Falling of naval cord is known as *Op Pai bhatu*. The naval cord of the girl child is kept at the house as it is believed that the girl is supposed to stay at home.

Six months after birth of the child first rice eating ceremony is held at the house of child's mother. This ritual is called *Mama maigasoni*. The first rice is fed by her maternal uncle and the child is gifted with brass plate, bowl and glass. The role of maternal uncle is very important in such rituals. Even in case of patrilocal residence same rituals are performed.

6.4.2 Marriage - In case of Rabha marriage bride's consent is important. Generally, proposal comes from the groom's side. Bride's father decides whether marriage is possible or not. The relationship between two families develops after fixation of marriage. Both bride and the groom provide service in their in-law's house before marriage. They exchange food. After few months the groom's family comes to the bride's house with *Handia* (country liquor) and many types of flowers. On this day the bride's maternal grandmother who is said to be the head woman of the family and groom's maternal grandmother fix the date of marriage. Then they exchange new clothes, betel nut, fruit etc. This ritual is called *Hubli*.





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The marriage ritual starts 7 days before the actual date of marriage. Before 7 days all the villagers come to the bride's house. At least one person from each family, specially belonging to the same clan goes to the forest for collection of fuel wood. During whole marriage rituals these woods are used for cooking purpose. Marriage responsibilities are divided among the clan members of the bride. The clan members promise the bride's family to give some food items like fish, meat, rice, corn etc for marriage. They also give furniture to the bride's family. This ritual is called *Jorap Dopain*. The villagers also provide financial support to the bride's family for other expenditures, which is called *Gharan*. On the date of marriage two betel leaves, two betel nuts, one bottle of *Handia* with new clothes are sent by groom's family to the bride's family. The bride wear the new cloth and she invites lord Shiva at marriage. This process is called *Denky*. After this ritual the bride and her father's sister's husband go to groom's house for bringing the groom. This ritual is called *Mislai*.

The marriage platform is prepared by the bride's family members. The newly married man gives a bundle of betel leaf and 12 pieces of betel nut to his wife and promises her wife that he surely carries this relationship for life time. This ritual is called *Goy Chotip Getaiaman*. At night the young brothers and sisters of the groom decorates the bed and the room for bride groom. On that day they got permission to stay together for first time. After 7 days they went to the groom's house for three days. This ritual is called *Nogou Bolani*. Groom's family takes groom price from bride's family after marriage which is called *Pai Cha Loni*. The amount varies from family to family. When the bride and groom come back at bride's house to stay in a matrilocal residence, the young brothers and sisters washes their foot and welcome the couple with flowers sweets and candles. It is called *Amai Vacam*.

The rituals suggested that the clan members as well as the villagers have very important roles to play in marriage. The elder women of the family have important position and their special roles are also recognised.





Inter caste marriage was once strictly prohibited. But now the Rabha boys are frequently marrying Hindu girls. Nikita (22 years), a Hindu girl belonging to *Sandilya* Gotra was married to Ashok Rabha (26 years). She did not change her Gotra, although she preferred Rabha as surname. They are living in Ashoke's parental house. In case of inter community marriage or marriage within same clan, the bride and groom had to follow some rites guided by the *Mondal* (the head man of the village) and village elders. Generally, they settle down with fine and feast.

6.4.3 Death - The Rabhas generally cremate and in certain cases they bury the dead bodies. There is no strict rule for the men and women to perform death ritual. Both can perform the rituals. The children and unmarried females are generally buried. After the cremation the naval cord is collected and buried at the bank of the river.

It can be observed that life cycle rituals of the Rabha still include matrifocal rituals which is imbedded in their culture. But inter-caste marriage is influencing change in their culture.

6.5 Family structure and matrilineal aspects:

The Rabhas of Andu Bana Basti prefer to live with their close kins. Traditional Rabha families are matrilineal and matrilocal. In the studied area both matrilocal and patrilocal families were found. The Rabha prefer to live in the joint or extended families.

Table – 4: Social variables

Social variables (Family)	Total number of families – 62 (100%)	
Family size	Number	Percentage



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Small ≤ 4	26	41.94
Medium ≥ 4	36	58.06
Family type		
Nuclear	18	29.03
Joint	22	35.48
Extended – Patriloc ally	11	17.74
Extended – Matrilocally	11	17.74
Residence type		
Matrilocal	18	29.03
Patrilocal	33	53.23
Neolocal	11	17.74
Descent		
Matrileal	61	98.39



Patrilineal	-	-
Bilineal	1	1.61

The average family size of the studied population was 5. It has been found that most of the families are medium in size having 6 to 9 members (58.06%) followed by small families having 1 to 4 members (41.94%). The families found in the studied area were mainly joint or extended types. Nuclear families have also been found.

On the basis of the structure, the families have been grouped under three types; nuclear, joint and extended. Under extended category two forms were found, patrilocal and matrilocal. The joint families included married couple with their married son and grandchildren like typical Hindu joint family. These families are patrilocal in nature. In case of patrilocal extended family, a variety of families were found. For example, married couple with their married son and widow daughter or married couple with widow mother of the man which may also be regarded as nuclear with addition. In case of matrilocal extended families married couple living with their married daughter and grandchildren have been included. Other types included nuclear with addition i.e. widow mother of the woman or widow sister or aunt etc.

The preference of staying in joint families was seen in the studied area as 35.48 % of the families were joint in type. It is also significant as these families were patrilocal. In case of extended families both patrilocal and matrilocal families were same in number. That means the number of matrilocal families are decreasing gradually. Considerable number of nuclear families was also found (29.03%). The structure of the family is related to the residence pattern followed by the Rabhas in Andu Bana Basti.



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It is interesting to find that many Rabha families are maintaining both matrilineal and patrilineal residence after marriage. In case of single girl child matrilineal residence is almost mandatory. If we consider three generations found in the studied area broadly, it must be noted that the residence pattern is based on the 2nd generation. The number of patrilineal family (53.23%) was more than the matrilineal family (29.03%). Matrilineal families include both extended type and nuclear types. A few families were neolocal as the married couples have settled in a separate household away from both the parents. It has also been observed that in case of some families the married couple is living with the parents of the groom, but the house belongs to the groom's mother. That means in first generation they were matrilineal, but in the second generation they became patrilineal. Such mixed type of residence was common. It shows the changing trend. Sometimes residence pattern depended on the requirement of the family. For example, Salemi Rabha in Andu Bana Basti decided to stay at groom's house as her younger sister and her husband was staying with her parents, while his mother-in-law was actually living in her father's house. The villagers think that it is important to look after the parents. It is less important who will take care of them. It may be daughter or son. It is important to note that in spite of changes in residence pattern the Rabha society still follows matrilineal descent rule. Patrilineal descent is absent. Only one family was found to follow bilineal descent.

6.6 Role of women in the family:

The position of the women in the Rabha family is high. They have specific roles to play in socio-economic life. Almost every woman in the family is engaged in economic activities. Apart from household chores, they actively participate in agriculture, collect of fuel woods from the jungle, go for fishing and even work as day labourer. The men and women take decision jointly regarding family matters. The aged women of the family have important role during birth and marriage ceremonies. They are like the pillars of the family. The women are now participating in local panchayat. The only domain which kept women away is the traditional village council or *Mondai*, although the council has become ornamental in the studied area. Many women were associated with





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Self Help Groups and involved in Joint Forest Management Committee. The Rabha women are adopting patriliney because of external cultural influence. The educated women are mostly influenced by the patrilineal ideology. But the old people still believe that the tradition of matriliney is desired as the daughters can stay with their parents. Daughters are precious to the society.

7.0 Conclusion:

The Rabha, a traditional matrilineal tribe of West Bengal are slowly changing towards patriliney. Various internal and external factors are stimulating this transformation. The study helps to understand how the Rabhas of the studied area are maintaining matrilineal aspects through their social organisation like family structure, kinship and clan. There are matrilineal nuclear and extended families in the village. Some kins from maternal side has great role to play in the family. At the same time the women have a special position in the families. Genealogical table also gives instances of both matrilineal and patrilineal residence pattern which exists in alternate generation. There are a number of exogamous matrilineal clan among the Rabha. The children inherit mother's clan. At present some patrilineal families are imposing father's clan on the children. The property inheritance pattern still follows matriliney in most cases. They prefer ultimogeniture, but at present they have learned to adjust with the existing situation in the family. It has been observed that many Rabha families in the studied area are changing their traditional religion and adopting other religious practices. Since religious faith is deeply rooted in tribal culture, change in religion could also stimulate change in age old custom. The young generation care for the parents. Their values emphasise on looking after the parents. Both the son and the daughter think alike in this regard. The young girls and boys are interested in patrilineal residence as they are highly influenced by the neighbouring communities, friends and surrounding cultures. But the old generation still believes that matriliney was the best practice and they are not at all happy with the transformation. The women in Rabha society were found to be more extrovert than the men. Specially, the young boys were shy and the young girls were smart and out spoken. The girls were more interested in education than the boys. They had decision making capacity in the family. They were economically independent.





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They were hard working and empowered. If the traditional matrilineal system is protected by the Rabha community the women will keep enjoying equal status in the society.

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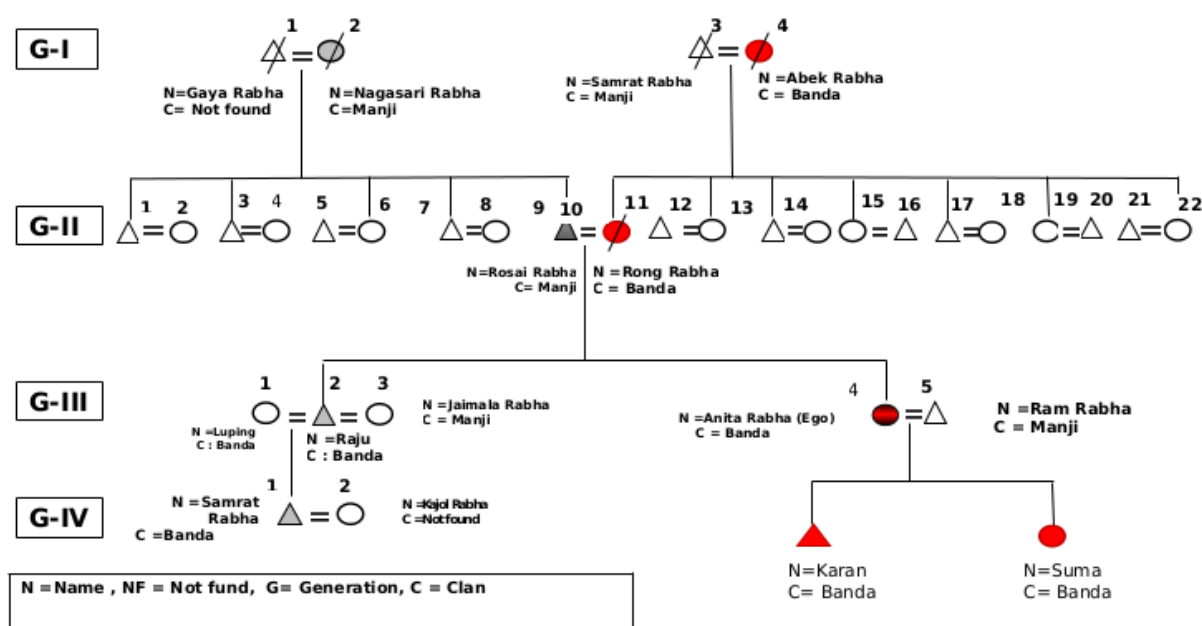
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9.0 ANNEXURE

Genealogical Table-1

Traditional matrilineal family

Name of the Informants : Anita Rabha (24 Years) and Rosai Rabha (62 Years)





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Genealogical Table - 2

Change from matriliney to patriliney

Name of the Informant : ITI RABHA (28 YEARS)

